

THE
EXCELLENCY
AND
ADVANTAGE
OF THE
Gospel Dispensation.

Compared with

The Law of MOSES, the Light of
NATURE, the Inventions of MEN, and
the Dominion of SIN;

Being more especially intended as a

Caveat against INFIDELITY;

BY SHOWING,

The great Expediency, and Usefulness of
REVELATION, and the peculiar Excellen-
cy of the *Christian Revelation*, in a Way con-
sistent with the general Goodness of GOD.

Robert Emmet ^{End of ye} _{dedication}

My yoke is easy, and my burthen light.

L O N D O N:

Printed for J. GRAY, at the *Cross-Keys*, in
the *Poultry*, near *Cheapside*. M.DCC.XXXII.
[Price One Shilling.]

THE

EXHIBITION

AND

Gold Medal

For the year 1883

General



The British Museum

London

1883

Printed by



T O

Mr. *Solomon Lowe.*

S I R,



S, in my younger years, I received from you the rudiments of knowledge ; I thought it not improper, to dedicate this, my first appearance in publick, to you : as a grateful acknowledgement of the benefit I received from your instructions so long since,

DEDICATION.

as well as the advantage of
your friendship still continu-
ed to,

S I R,

Your obliged,

Humble Servant,

ROBERT EMMS.



THE
PREFACE.

AS I have exceeded the limits of my intentions in this discourse, I shall not add to it by a tedious preface. When I first turn'd my thoughts on this subject; I intended no more, than from the pulpit to guard the younger part, especially of those to whom I then preach'd, from the impression of infidelity: but as I have since had sufficient leisure, though attended with a very infirm state of health, I was willing to review, and enlarge my thoughts; and communicate them to the publick, as an offering in service

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*vice of religion. I have endeavour-
ed to give no offence to any: but
have represented the Christian Reli-
gion just as it appears to myself,
without regard to any particular
party. If any think fit to give
these lines the reading, I only de-
sire they may do it without par-
tiality; and not refuse what may be
conclusive for the sake of what ap-
pears otherwise to them.*

*I have, thro' the whole, aim'd at
setting forth the excellency of the
Christian Religion: but have been
most particular on the comparative
view of Christianity with natural Re-
ligion, as thinking it most seasonable
at present. I hope after so much as
has been writ on the subject of pro-
phesies, and miracles, I may be ex-
cused that I have not insisted par-
ticularly on the proof of those exter-
nal evidences. My chief design is
to induce men to submit to the go-
vernment of Christ from its internal
excellency; and to vindicate it from
objections*

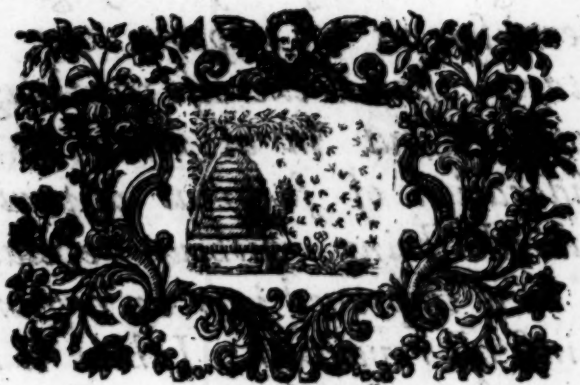
The P R E F A C E. iii

objections against that. In this part I have expressed a larger charity to the Heathen world; and been more particular in considering their state, than some may think needful. The religion of Jesus breathing so much charity, and expressly declaring that GOD is LOVE; I am not apprehensive I have extended my charity further than becomes a disciple of the merciful Jesus. I readily acknowledge it is of infinitely greater concern for us to improve our advantages, than to exercise our thoughts on others: but in as much as the consideration of so great a part of mankind being without revelation has been improved into an argument against all revelation; I think it may deserve some thoughts.

If what I now publish may be successful to recover the Sceptical, to confirm the Christian, and to engage those who own Christianity to live suitably to it, and enter into the pleasures of religion: it is what I
desire,

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desire, and pray for. But whatever be the event, I shall have the pleasure of having sincerely intended to recommend the love of God, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.



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T H E



THE
Excellency and Advantage
OF THE
Gospel Dispensation.



WHEN I seriously consider the advantages of *Revelation*, and especially of the Gospel Revelation; the benefit hereof appears so evident, that I cannot but wonder, that any who are acquainted with it should oppose it: and especially in a country, where they have the advantage of having it fairly proposed to them. For it must be acknowledged, that this dispensation, so worthy of God, and so beneficial to man, has been in some parts of the world, and by some persons, so greatly corrupted, and represented so widely different from what it really is in its genuine simplicity; that had men no other way of forming a judgment of christianity, than from some representations given of it by men of superstitious and corrupt minds, it would be

no wonder, if it met with opposition from such as reason and think with freedom. But blessed be God, this is not the case with us. We have the sacred oracles themselves to consult ; in which (notwithstanding some particular difficulties, not affecting the plain and sufficient evidence of their containing a divine revelation, nor the general and standing rule of a christian's actions in order to his acceptance with God) in which sacred oracles, I say, we may clearly discern one great design carried on through a variety of dispensations, and various degrees of revelation ; namely, the recovery of mankind to a state of holiness, and consummate happiness, in and through a Mediator.

This is the apparent design of the scripture Revelation, from the giving of the first promise to the appearance of our Lord in his personal ministry. And this was the manifest tendency of his heavenly doctrine : and to this end were the Apostles commissioned by him to disciple the nations : and for this work were they qualified, both by the instructions of their great Lord and Master, and by the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost. When we impartially consider the doctrines taught us, the duties enjoined us, the assistance promised us, and the motives proposed to us by Christ, and his inspired Apostles ; we must acknowledge the yoke of Christ to be easy and his burthen light : and should rejoice, that his kind and gracious invitation is extended to us. For when he says, *Matt. xi. 28, 29, 30. Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart ; and ye shall find rest for your souls : for my yoke is easy, and my burthen is light :* there can be no doubt but this kind invitation may without violence be extended to us Gentiles.

And

And since it is an important truth, that the yoke of Christ is easy, and his burthen light, it highly concerns us to be duly apprised of it: especially as a thorough consideration hereof would manifestly tend to raise our highest gratitude to God for placing us under the dominion of our Lord Jesus Christ; and to reconcile our minds to an entire submission to him. Now though I think, the text refer'd to, may be justly extended to us *Gentiles*, yet, I readily grant, that

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ did immediately address himself to the *Jews*. It was to them, that his personal ministry was chiefly, almost entirely confined. For he himself says: *I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.* Matt. xv. 24. He was the prophet, whom God promised to the *Jews* to raise up like unto *Moses*, from among their brethren; that one eminent person, of whom they discovered their expectations: *Art thou he that should come?* Matt. xi. 3. And to whom they were required to hearken. This glorious person, who was afterwards declared to be the Son of God with power, by his resurrection from the dead, did graciously invite the *Jews* to come unto him, and to take his yoke upon them, with an assurance, that his yoke is easy, and his burthen light; and that in so doing, they would find rest for their souls. And, had they obeyed the call, and complied with the invitation; they would have found relief and ease from the burthen of the ceremonial law: a yoke which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear; which was added by reason of transgression; a dispensation, which could not make the comers thereunto perfect, *Heb. x. 1.*

There were indeed wise reasons for such a dispensation: as, partly to keep them a distinct people, and to preserve them from idolatry,

while they were continually employed in the service of the true God ; partly to remind them of their obligation to purity, and true holiness ; and partly as a schoolmaster, to bring them unto Christ, *Gal. iii. 24*, the law being a type and shadow of that truth, of that grace and mercy that came by Christ who was the end of the law : for which reason the law was not perpetual, but of a temporary institution ; as the Apostle reasons in the Epistle to the *Hebrews vii. 18*. *There is verily a disanulling of the commandment going before, for the unprofitableness thereof*. Notwithstanding this, as the law was not for its own sake, and as tho' real holiness consisted in the performances thereby required, any further than complied with in obedience to divine authority, and for the ends proposed : yet, it might be said to give them much labour that were exercised therein ; and occasion them to be heavy laden : and from this they might expect ease, by receiving the dispensation of the Messiah, to which they were invited by our Lord.

And further they would, by taking the yoke of the Messiah, or submitting to his authority, have found ease under the *Roman* yoke. It is true our Lord's kingdom is not of this world : And therefore he never courted their acceptance of him by proposing to subdue their enemies under them. Nevertheless there is reason to believe their embracing the Messiah, would have been attended with ease, in respect to the *Roman* yoke which they groaned under : and that, not only as the principles of his religion had the highest tendency to promote contentment, and administer supports under every disagreeable circumstance in life ; but also as it would have prevented such a conduct in them, as provoked the resentment of the *Roman* power, and so have prevented those terrible

ble effects of it, which terminated in the most calamitous ruin of that people; and that, occasion'd by their obstinate rejection of the true Messiah, and their confident expectation of a temporal deliverer, even to the last extremity.

7 Nor is it reasonable to doubt but that the *Jewish* converts were generally preserv'd from being equally involved in that calamity, and that from the warning given them by our Lord's predictions.

2. It may further be observ'd, that, as our Lord went about doing good, and healing all manner of diseases, there is no reason to exclude such as were groaning under the calamities of life from this kind and general invitation. And since he is by all his disciples acknowledged to be a spiritual Saviour; all such will readily admit the invitation to be extended to such as were mourning under a sense of their spiritual maladies. This I shall not enlarge upon at present, but proceed to shew that,

3. The invitation of our Lord, though given to the *Jews*, may be justly extended to all to whom the Gospel is preached. Those that labour and are heavy laden, of every nation under Heaven, to whom this dispensation is made known, may justly conceive of Christ as speaking to them in his word. For though, according to the scheme of divine government, our Lord's personal ministry was among the peculiar chosen people of God; and the apostles were to preach the Gospel (repentance, and remission of sins in the name of Jesus) first among them: yet, on the refusal of the *Jews* they turned to the *Gentiles*; and their preaching the same Gospel to them was agreeable to the purpose of God, that Christ should be a light unto the *Gentiles*, and for salvation unto the ends of the earth, *Acts* xiii.

47. And, thus, we *Gentiles* are authorized to regard the words of our Saviour, before mentioned, as left on record for our instruction, and encouragement, under the various difficulties of life; and as a kind and gracious invitation to us to come unto him: with an intimation of the ease of his government, and an assurance, that on so doing, we shall find rest to our souls.

But, then, we are carefully to remember that our coming to Christ must be in order to learn of him; and with a disposition to submit to his authority, and government. (1.) This we are induc'd to from the character our Lord gives of himself, *meek and lowly*. And this character rather than any other, may be here mentioned to direct us in particular to learn a meek, and lowly spirit of him, to which a due consideration of the meek and lowly Jesus will greatly conduce. This must not be regarded as of little moment; but of the highest importance to our framing right apprehensions of our religion: this is necessary to our being of a teachable spirit; and is attended with the encouragement of express promises: *The meek will be guide in judgment, and the meek will be teach in his way.* Ps. xxv. 9. *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.* James iv. 6. (2.) It is a further motive to our submission to the authority of Jesus Christ, that his yoke is easy, and his burthen light. The laws and maxims of his government being happily form'd to enlighten our minds, and rectify our mistakes; to such as submit to him his government will therefore appear mild, and easy. Not that we are to apprehend his yoke to be easy, and his burthen light, in contradistinction to such passages of his own instructions, as put us upon counting the cost of becoming his disciples: *viz.* to be content

content to take up the cross, and follow him *Matt. xvi. 24.* to see that our righteousness exceed that of the *scribes*, and *pharisees*, *Matt. v. 20.* to strive to enter in at the strait gate, *Matt. vii. 13, &c.* If we would entertain hopes of being acknowledged by him, we must not be ashamed of him before men, *Mark viii. 38.* and consequently we are not at liberty to think, and speak, and act as we please; but must acknowledge his authority, and be obedient to his laws; if we would find rest to our souls: and then may we justly rejoice in hope of the promised rest; for he is the author of eternal salvation to all that obey him. This being premised, I now proceed to what I chiefly intend, namely,

To show in what respects our Redeemer's yoke is easy, and his burthen light. Now if I can make it appear that *the government of Christ is light and easy, compared with the Mosaic dispensation, the law of nature, the inventions of men, the dominion of sin, or the power of vicious habits:* if this, I say, can be made appear; I may justly assert that the yoke of Christ is easy, and his burthen light; and that to submit thereunto, is the wisest course men can take in order to their present ease, and to find rest unto their souls. This is what I hope to make evident; and since our Lord's personal ministry was among the *Jews*, and his invitations made to them; I begin with endeavouring to show,

§. I. *That the government of Christ is easy compared with the Jewish ceremonial law, and that in diverse respects,*

1. It is so on account of the greater evidence or clearness of the whole dispensation. It is with reference to that veil'd and shadowy dispensation, that the apostle *Paul* says, we (*Christians*) all
with

with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed, 2 Cor. iii. 13. We have now a more clear discernment of the glory of the Redeemer, his nature, and offices, than they had. Some things, which they only discern'd as afar off, and which were difficult when only read in prophecy, are plain to us since the accomplishment; not that the prophecies were express'd ambiguously, like the *heathen* oracles, with design to be capable of accomplishment by different and contrary events. No! for though it must be granted that all the prophecies were not each of them alike full and clear, God having by diverse manners, and in various degrees spoken to the fathers, *Heb. i. 1.* yet we may see an amazing harmony in their terminating and centring in the person of the Messiah, though many of them were given forth, at great distance of time from each other.

The true reason why the pious *Jews*, and the apostles themselves, for a while, were so much at a loss in understanding those prophecies that are now most clear to us; was, not only that they, as well as others, were pleased with temporal prosperity, and so might the more readily fall in with the general notion of the *Jews* of that age; but their difficulty arose likewise from the stupendousness of the design, wherein the thoughts of God appeared to be as high as Heaven above the thoughts of men; and hence they were at a loss with respect to some of the plainest predictions. To be *David's* son, and yet his lord, was a problem to the *Jews* in the days of our Lord's ministry; which they knew not how to resolve; and yet never pretended to deny its reference to the Messiah. And it is no wonder that they overlook'd so much the descriptions of a suffering Saviour, as what the inclinations of
animal

animal nature were not likely to byass them to ; especially when we consider what paradoxes they were to frail short-sighted men. To be a priest for ever, and yet to be cut off for the sins of the people. To sit on the throne of his father *David*, and be exalted to universal dominion : and yet to be stricken and afflicted of God, and despised of men, these things they knew not how to account for : nor was it any wonder that they were more delighted with the descriptions of his exalted state. But now to us, who see at least in a good measure the accomplishment of seemingly disagreeing prophecies of our Lord ; and that in a true and proper sense, and in the only conceivable sense, in which they can agree ; it is a confirmation to our faith. And here by the way the *Jewish* fable, concerning two Messiahs, the one suffering, the other victorious, is a virtual confession, that their scriptures do as truly, and literally describe the suffering as the glorious state of the Messiah. But what I chiefly intend here, is to observe the great advantage of the Gospel above the law of *Moses*, in the clearer discovery of the Messiah, the object of their hopes ; the spiritual nature of his kingdom, and the way of salvation by him. In this respect *Christians* have vastly the advantage of the *Jews*, who waited for the redemption of *Israel* : while we behold this Son of *David* as the head over all things : and as *David* was king over God's peculiar people, so we behold nations of *Gentile* converts now the people of God by visible profession, acknowledging as their Lord and head, their Prince and Saviour, this Son of *David*. Nor is it unreasonable to expect that the *Jews* (tho' at present enemies to the Gospel,) shall, as a people, acknowledge the Messiah's title, and submit themselves to the authority and do-

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minion

minion of Jesus the Son of *David*, since as touching the election they are beloved for the fathers sakes, Rom. xi. 28. and since though dispersed among the nations, they are yet preserved a distinct and separate people.

Further, all their numerous sacrifices could but atone for ceremonial offences; they were useful, indeed, to preserve in the minds of that people a sense of God's holiness; and to prepare them for the doctrine of atonement by a Redeemer: but they never were design'd for the atonement of heinous immoralities. Hence *David* cries out, *Psal.* li. 16. *Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it.* But the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sins: and we are called to repentance, with the assurance of remission of sins, in the name of Jesus; even from those, which, by the law of *Moses*, no provision was made for.

2. The government of Christ is easier than the law of *Moses*; on account of the greater plainness of its precepts, for the general conduct of our lives. The one abounds in many burthensome rites, in which they were continually employed: the other insists on the practice of the eternal, and invariable duties of religion; its positive injunctions being very few in number, more simple in their nature, and more obvious in their design, to advance real holiness, and the practice of those duties which approve themselves to our understanding as worthy of God to enjoin, and necessary for us to practise. Such as the love of God in the highest degree; which implies esteem and reverence of the supreme Being, and acting suitably to the relation we bear to him; and then encourages our committing our selves to him in well doing, as to our faithful Creator. Next to this, the loving our neighbour (that is according

[II]

according to the scripture explication, all mankind) as our selves, is plainly founded on our mutual relations and wants; and must be highly beneficial, as it evidently tends to the general good of mankind; forasmuch as every one stands in need of assistance from others; and it is no small recommendation of Christ's institutions, that they extend our obligations so widely, plainly correcting the mistake of the *Jews*. Again, the laws of temperance and sobriety, and the moderation of our passions, are apparently necessary in order to our being capable of serving and enjoying God, or having the true rational, and most sublime enjoyment of our selves: and, without the observance of those laws, we lose the benefits of those faculties, by which we are distinguished from the beasts; and become incapable of performing the relative duties of life. Not that I suppose the *Jewish* church was without instruction in righteousness: but I conceive our advantage to lie in the manner of instruction, not being so much by types, and shadows, and ceremonial usages; in which the law of *Moses* abounded, and by which they were, under that dispensation, instructed, and preserved as God's peculiar people. God, indeed, took care, by his prophets to warn them against supposing that true religion consisted merely in such ceremonial observances, to the neglect of moral holiness: but surely it must be an advantage to be discharged from such numerous, and typical rites; and more plainly, more directly, and immediately instructed in real holiness.

3. I cannot overlook the *example of Christ* himself as set before us in the history of his life and death; this ought to be esteem'd as a great advantage, in that it highly conduces to form our minds to true holiness: nor can I doubt but

many christians, while they have been contemplating his example, have felt its attractive force in transforming them to his likeness.

4. Again, there was much of outward solemnity in the temple worship; and men were obliged, at certain seasons, to go up thither: but we are not now obliged to *such expensive and wearisome journeys*: but God is every where to be worshipped in spirit and in truth; and he is nigh unto all such worshippers, in what place soever they call upon his name.

5. The dispensation of the Messiah has the advantage of that of *Moses*, in that *life and immortality are brought into the strongest, clearest, and most convincing light*, by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and by the more express declarations of that important truth; and hence the motives to engage, and quicken our obedience, are more directly and immediately taken from things unseen, and eternal----whereas the sanctions of the law of *Moses* were chiefly, if not altogether, temporal. Not that we are to suppose, under that law, that all regard to a future state was neglected; the contrary manifestly appears from the conduct of the pious *Jews*: some of whom were tortured not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Yet, the dispensation of *Moses* was plainly temporal, and perhaps its sanctions were only temporal, that is, directly, and immediately so. And this might suit their state of minority; and be a proper accommodation to their peculiar circumstances; and a relief to their faith under the more obscure intimations they had of life and immortality: while God so ordered things in the course of his providence, that obedience was generally attended with national prosperity, and disobedience with publick calamities. And this might

might likewise be suited to convince the minds of the observing *Gentiles*, that the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, as likewise of the superintendency of the divine providence. Nor is it absurd to suppose, that such pious persons, as might share in the publick calamities which the general and national impiety of the *Jews* had brought upon them, might thereby be led from present to unseen objects, and be so assisted as to have further apprehensions of life and immortality, than was the common attainment of such who lived under that dispensation: and this, as a relief to their afflicted state. This seems illustrated in the case of *Job* (tho' not a *Jew*,) under his great trials, who stretches his thoughts beyond what is reasonable to suppose was the common attainment of his cotemporaries; and was probably the case of the pious *Jews* under the persecutions of *Antiochus*. However the sanctions of the law of *Moses* were temporal. The law, indeed, did not make void the promises, that were before the giving of the law: nor will I deny but that their temporal sanctions might adumbrate things spiritual to the minds of the pious *Jews*: but yet considering the direct sanctions of the law that they were immediately under, it must, I think, be owned that we have great advantage under the gospel dispensation; in which our faith is required more directly, and more immediately to regard the recompence of that eternal reward, that is set before us in the clearest light, and with the strongest evidence. And hence, we may see why, we are not now to expect so strict or so general a connexion between obedience and outward prosperity, as under the law of *Moses*: because the great motive of life and immortality shines forth to us in a stronger light; and we have the fullest assurance that these light afflictions

which

which we may suffer for the sake of righteousness, will work out for us a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory.

But as from these considerations, I hope, it does appear that the government of Christ is more easy than the law of *Moses*: it ought not to seem strange, or be made an *objection* to Christ's law, if, in some respects, we are laid under greater restraints than the *Jews* were. If we are brought under a more perfect dispensation, have clearer light, and greater helps, God may reasonably expect from us more than was indispensably required of them. And, if the restraints we are under, and the severer regimen of our appetites, and passions, bear but a proportion to the greater helps, and restore us nearer to the estate of original perfection, and nearer to the state above, where our conversation ought to be, and where we shall be like the angels: and yet such restraints are not above the present state of our nature, with the helps afforded us; nor inconsistent with the general state of mankind. And if even these restraints on our passions, and appetites, will prevent many inconveniencies, which would naturally arise from their greater indulgence: then such restraints are rather a recommendation of the law of Christ, as more perfective of our nature. That such restraints are not above the state of our nature, under the helps of the gospel, will be confirmed by the testimony of thousands, who have submitted to that yoke; and that of various tempers, and constitutions: and that they exempt from many inconveniencies, will be obvious to every one that considers the subject: I shall therefore not detain the reader any longer, but proceed

§. II. To shew that, *The dispensation of the gospel is easy, and of singular advantage to us above the law of nature.*

I am far from intending to depreciate the law of nature, or designing to represent it as at variance with the revelation of Jesus. No! The law of nature will for ever be good, and unchangeably obliging; it being only an obligation to act reasonably, or agreeably to our natures and various relations; and that from a sense of God's authority, or that it is his will that we should so act. Nor would I detract from the general goodness of God, whose tender mercies are over all his works; and who did not leave the nations without a witness of his eternal power, and godhead, which they were capable of learning or inferring from the things that were seen. There is no need of this to magnify the gracious dispensation of the gospel, as being peculiarly advantageous to us. For, if we consider how much danger we are in of mis-judging by the influence of our passions, present interest, prepossessions from education, and long received customs; it must be acknowledged a great help to have the duties of religion, (even such as are truly discernible by the light of nature,) plainly, and authoritatively enjoined us by a teacher sent from God.

And, if we consider the general state of mankind at the coming of our Lord, and the first preaching of the gospel; we may see reason to believe, not only that the coming of the Messiah was a great benefit to men; but also that his coming at that time was wisely appointed, as peculiarly seasonable, and mercifully adapted to the then circumstances of the world; as well as in accomplishment of the ancient predictions concerning the

the time of his coming. This deserves more particular consideration: but I shall content my self at present with only observing that the world in general, whether *Jews*, or *Gentiles*, were so depraved at that time, that we must acknowledge the sending of a divinely authorized teacher, as an act of great compassion towards men in their wandrings from the paths of true righteousness; and that the works that our Lord did, and the miracles performed by the Apostles, were proper to summon, and awaken the attention of men to what they had to offer; and when the doctrine appeared rational, and beneficial, such works were also fitted to convince men that the doctrine was from God. Now the kindness of God herein will appear, if we consider not only the corrupt, dark, and ignorant state of mankind in general at the first promulgation of the Gospel: but also how much men are in general at all times, prone to be influenced by a regard to the interests of animal life; so that when once corruptions in religion have obtained the sanctions of publick authority, it is such a fence to them, as renders them formidable: few have courage to act against the stream, especially when they would probably be thereby exposed to great hardships. From these and the like considerations, it is no way probable, when men had departed from truth by going after their own inventions, that they would ever have brought about a general reformation, by the mere exercise of their own reason. It seems more probable that they would, if possible, have generally grown worse. Neither is it at all probable that the wiser, and better part of the *heathen* world would have broke through all the mists of darkness, and error, that had so generally beclouded their minds, so as to have obtained a thorough, and clear discernment of what we now call

call natural religion; and not improperly, because it is what reason approves of, (even without, or abstracting from the authority of revelation enjoining it) when it is fairly propos'd; but it is one thing to approve, or assent to a truth when clearly propos'd; and another to discern such truth by the mere exercise of our own faculties; when custom, interest, inclination, and early prepossessions all sway us to the contrary. But whatever may be conceived as barely possible to be attain'd to by the mere strength of a human mind, under such disadvantages; it is very certain that such attainment is greatly facilitated by instruction: and therefore as it is an honour to the gospel revelation, that it insists on the observance of natural religion, so it ought to be reckon'd with thankfulness; as,

1. One great advantage of that dispensation, that *the truths, and duties of natural religion, are more plainly taught, and authoritatively enforc'd therein*; as well as every thing else that is of general necessity for Christians to be informed of, for their faith and practice. When I say such things are plainly taught, I mean, that they are so, to those who will act reasonably; who, in reading the *holy scriptures*, will do as men commonly do, in reading other writings, *viz.* explain the more obscure, and less frequent passages, by the more general and more plain, carefully observe the main intention of the writer, which will doubtless lead us to understand some passages, very differently from what they would appear taken separately, as independent sentences, without observing their connexion, or the general design of the writer. And tho' we should be at a loss for the true sense of some particular passages, written on singular occasions, and referring to some peculiar circumstances, or customs that we are not fully apprized of;

of; yet is that no objection against the clearness, and plainness of the general rule of faith, and practice. Who sees not for instance, that St. *Paul* in 1 *Cor.* xv. is plainly asserting the resurrection of the dead; though they may be at a loss to understand certainly what the apostle means by being baptised for the dead, *ver.* 29. This was doubtless what the *Corinthians* well knew, and were concern'd in: but our not understanding that particular passage does not affect the main of the Apostle's reasoning, nor throw an obscurity on the general doctrine. Some things we should probably better understand, were we in the circumstances of the persons immediately address'd to: but, as we are not, we may be safely ignorant; so long as such difficulties do not affect the general rule of faith, and practice, which remains, notwithstanding, clear, and plain in its directions to us. And what renders it of the more extensive use, is,

2. Another advantage of the Gospel-dispensation, a *standing ministry* in the church: it must be acknowledg'd that men are fitted, with peculiar qualifications, for different employments in life; and that they are most likely to excel in those stations for which they were educated, and are most peculiarly qualified for by genius. It must therefore be allow'd that the instructions of faithful, skilful, and prudent ministers must be of great benefit, as the world is now situated; considering how many avocations men have from a strict, and close application to the study of religion, (whether natural, or revealed) by the necessary business, and recreations of life; not to mention those that are unnecessary, which are too engaging, and endless; and consequently, it must be a great advantage to the knowledge, and practice of righteousness, for men on set seasons, to have their duty explain'd and inculcated by those,

those, who are disengaged from the secular employments of life; and whose main business it is to study religion themselves, and set forth the excellency thereof to others. This may be beneficial even to the more knowing Christians, as it is calculated to keep up an habitual sense of those things, which they do know; but which they are not out of danger of neglecting to regard; inasmuch as a continual engagement in worldly affairs, and the strong influence of things present, that are ever before us, are apt gradually to weaken the influence of such motives, as arise from unseen objects, though real, and most important. But the advantage hereof to the bulk of mankind is still more considerable, for their instruction in the knowledge of true religion. By such help they may be led to a further acquaintance with the will of God, have clearer apprehensions of the divine perfections, and a more perfect understanding of the *holy scriptures*, than, without such help, it would be possible for them to attain to, considering their education, employment, &c. They may, by the instruction of a minister, be convinced of the truth of a doctrine, and the obligations to a duty; and that not from the authority of the preacher, but the force of the arguments made use of for the conviction of their own understanding, which arguments they might never have before attended to, or been apprized of. By such a help they may be led to read the *holy scriptures* with greater pleasure, better understanding, and more advantage. By pointing out to them the general (and to the careful observer) the apparent design of the writer, the connexion of the discourse, and the idiom of the language; by comparing one passage with another, a passage to them more difficult with one more plain, &c. Such helps, if attended to,

will greatly contribute to the plainness of the scripture rule; and afford delight and instruction even from those parts, which, for want of such observations, they would be greatly in the dark about.

Nor are they hereby render'd lords over our faith, but helpers of our joy. We do not propose them as authoritative interpreters of Christ's law: but as such as may nevertheless be greatly helpful to our understanding; by whose means light and knowledge may be conveyed to us; so, as that we may believe, and practise, not because the minister says, but because we ourselves see reason to believe the truth of what he says. So that this leaves room for the exercise of our understanding in judging of what we hear; and is perfectly consistent with our obligation to call no man father; and theirs not to be lords over God's heritage. Were it otherwise, instead of being a help and a blessing, ministers might become a burthen, and a curse to mankind; and bring upon themselves the resentment of their great lord, and master; ---- and the people lose the benefit design'd by such an institution, if it may not rather be said to cease to be of Christ's appointment: for, he never intended that our faith should depend on the authority of men, but on the authority of God: and therefore, while we own their usefulness as helpers in the way of righteousness; we should be careful to examine what we hear, and to call no man father upon earth; for one is our father which is in heaven. So may we be secur'd from the attempts of ill-designing men: so shall we see reason to own the wisdom, and goodness of God in providing such helps: so may we have benefit and advantage from the labours of fallible men; while we yield our assent to what, by their means, our judgments

judgments are convinced of; and withhold our assent to what they propose, when unattended with such conviction.

Upon the whole, therefore, it appears to be a great advantage to mankind, to have an authentic rule of faith and practice, with such helps; even supposing that rule to contain only the doctrines, and duties of natural religion; and those helpers only design'd to explain and inculcate them.

It is true we are supposed to be reasonable creatures, and therefore oblig'd to exercise our understandings in applying the rule given, and making use of the helps afforded us: but then it must be own'd a great advantage to have so many excellent lessons of morality, and those illustrated, and set forth, as reduced into practice by great examples of virtue, and especially by the captain of our salvation. This must greatly facilitate our attaining true notions of religion, and lead us into an apprehension of those things, that are grave, honourable, lovely, and of good report. And then when we consider our selves as authoritatively enjoin'd so to behave our selves; this adds a force, and strengthens the obligation that arises from the suitableness of such conduct: and this may have peculiar efficacy, when virtue is under a struggle, and we are ready to yield to a present temptation. Especially in those instances, which do not appear with the fullest evidence to be simply and absolutely criminal; the power of interest, and strength of inclination may darken the understanding: and, when we would have a thing right, it is too natural to find excuses to have it so. It is certainly a very possible case to suppose that a man may not have a full and irresistible evidence of the simple and absolute evil of some particular practices; and yet be fully convinced that such a particular practice is neither

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facile credimus qd. volumus

decent, nor honourable, &c. And, thus, when ready to yield to some base and mean action, may recover himself, and stop short, under the force of such a conviction ; whatever may be said to excuse and palliate such an action, my conscience plainly convinces me, it is neither lovely, nor of good report ; and this being certainly and peremptorily declared, as an obligation of that law I am now under ; I dare not proceed : and thus he may be preserved from the first deviations from the paths of virtue ; and such authoritative declarations greatly conduce thereto. *Thus saith the Lord*, must have a forcible influence on those, who own revealed religion, and greatly conduce to the practice of natural religion ; particularly in those seasons, when we are most in danger of being remiss, or partial in considering what are the obligations of natural religion. Thus the revelation of Jesus is an advantage to us, as it more readily advances our knowledge of what we call natural religion, than the mere exercise of our reason would do ; and is better fitted to promote the practice of it. But that is not all ; but, further,

3. There are *peculiar doctrines of the Gospel*, which are of singular advantage for us to know, in our circumstances, consider'd as fallen and sinful creatures ; and are admirably calculated to improve and advance our notions of the divine perfections ; and to recover us to the perfection of our natures ; and in this respect, it is to us, in our circumstances, preferable to the guidance of reason.

Indeed, I here take it for granted, that men are not in the original perfection of nature. However that be, there is no doubt but that we are far from such a state as can be conceiv'd perfect. The universal voice of mankind will confess

selfs that they have not been perfectly righteous; and we may observe, in our present state, a frequent opposition (as *St. Paul* phrases it) between the law of our minds, and the law of our members; that is, between the dictates of our understanding, and the appetites of animal nature, or the inclinations excited from outward objects. And though it is indeed, when lust conceives and brings forth sin, that we become guilty and obnoxious to punishment; yet I believe I might venture an appeal to all the sons of *Adam*, whether their own consciences do not charge them with actual sin. We have all come short of the glory of God, and are all become guilty before him. This, the word of God, and the voice of conscience bear witness to.

4. Now, let us compare *the assistance, or relief* natural religion will afford us under the sense of guilt, with the relief of the Gospel —. I dare not say natural religion would afford us no hope; for I think that would be speaking hardly of God. No! without the help of revelation, it seems natural to argue, from the general goodness of God, in supplying us with food and raiment, and in preserving the race of mankind thro' successive generations, that he does not intend their remediless ruin. It does not seem agreeable to reason, to suppose that the great preserver of all things, continues a race of creatures, and gives them many good things to enjoy, fills their hearts with gladness, and endows them with many excellent capacities; and all this in order only to their future, certain, and unavoidable misery. No! The goodness, and the patience or forbearance of God, is, and ought to be consider'd as a motive to repentance, and encouragement to hope in his mercy. This is agreeable both to the dictates of reason, and revelation.

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Thus far, I conceive, they agree; and, further, if reason does suggest that God is the most perfect of beings; this would lead us to infer that, in equity he will judge the nations; and that, at one time or other, he will make a difference betwixt the righteous, and the wicked; and that, as he has no need of the destruction of his creatures for his own happiness, so that their various degrees of happiness and misery will arise, either from the nature of things, or the ends to be answer'd in the divine government; that is, that some degree of happiness or misery, will be the natural consequence of men's actions; and that positive rewards, and punishments will, at least, may be so far added, as may answer the ends of a wise administration, in the encouragement of virtue, and deterring from vice; and for the publick display of the wisdom, purity, and immense goodness of the creator and governour of the universe. And this will incline men to think, that there will be naturally a difference in men's future estate, according to their various attainments in virtue, or degeneracy in vice: and that not only perfect indefectible virtue (if such were to be found) shall be eminently distinguished; but that even the comparatively innocent, and virtuous part of mankind shall be distinguished from the profane; that those who have adverted to the candle of the Lord, the light of reason, in the conduct of their lives, will not be in the same condition with those, who, not delighting to retain the knowledge of God in their minds, have abandon'd themselves to commit iniquity with greediness, and are wholly sensual in their affections. Hence it will likewise follow, that, under the consciousness of guilt, repentance and amendment, is the only proper course to be taken, and the most likely way to be

be received into the divine favour. So that the light of nature would, if attended to, give encouragement to the practice of virtue, and likewise to the breaking off iniquities by repentance. So much hope would be administer'd by the light of nature, as to render such a practice reasonable, and to encourage it.— Thus far, I think, may be safely allowed in favour of natural religion: but, though all this be granted, yet there is manifestly an advantage administer'd to us by the christian dispensation; and that with respect to the strength and degree of hope, and also with reference to the greatness of the object hoped for. The light of nature may indeed administer hopes to the sinner, and such as would render it highly rational to attempt a virtuous course of life: but yet this hope can never arise to an equal degree from the mere dictates of reason abstracted from revelation, as from covenant, and promise. While the sinner hopes, it is yet natural for fears and jealousies to arise; and especially when under convictions of great guilt. If my misery renders me an object of mercy, yet my sin renders me deserving of punishment. If God cannot be profited by my blood, by my ruin; yet neither can he be profited by my service. And what reparation can I make for the injuries I have done? Who knows how long he will exercise patience? Or to what degree he will pardon? Or whether he may not see fit to devote me (especially if a great offender) to destruction, as a terror to others? We see, amongst men, and under wise administrations, sorrow for past offences is not always attended with exemption from punishment. In some cases the hope, suggested by the light of nature arises no higher than a *who can tell if*

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God will repent, and turn away from the fierceness of his anger, that we perish not, as in the case of the Ninevites? Again, should he remit the severity of his anger, and I not utterly perish; yet, who can tell to what degree of favour he will admit me? Though he should abate the power of his wrath; yet, what room have I to expect the same favour as an innocent and righteous creature?

Now the gospel dispensation is of vast advantage to us, consider'd as guilty creatures, in setting a greater, and better hope before us, and raising us to a greater degree of hope, than is attainable by the mere light of nature. Does the light of nature discover to us the divine perfections, so as to render the Almighty Father of all, an object of our reverence and religious trust? this the revelation of Jesus does, with advantage; while we have the knowledge of the glory of God shining forth in the face or person of our Lord Jesus Christ: in whom we have manifested, the purity and holiness of the divine majesty; and at the same time the strongest expressions of the divine philanthropy: that God is love; that he so loved the world as to give up his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life; that, believing in him, we might be recovered from the power of death; and from all the unhappy consequences, to which our actual guilt renders us obnoxious. In this verily was the love of God manifested towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him; herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us; and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins, &c. And, as this is a higher manifesta-

manifestation of the love of God, than shines forth in the light of nature ; so it manifestly tends to beget us to a more lively hope ; to raise our hopes to a higher object, and to a more confirm'd degree.

(1.) This display of the divine love, through our Lord Jesus Christ, tends to raise our hopes to a higher object. The light of nature may direct the sinner to judge it his wisest course to return to that God, whose goodness is over all his works. If he improves and exercises his reason in attending to the universal manifestation of God's perfections ; he may hope to share in his mercies ; though, with the *Canaanitish* woman, it be but as the dogs partake of the crumbs that fall from their master's table ; or like the returning prodigal, with the expectation of being treated as an hired servant : but, to be received with the highest expressions of paternal affection, for the hope of this we are entirely indebted to revelation ; and, by way of holy surprize, may well cry out, *What manner of love is this that we should be called the sons of God ; that God should not spare, but freely give his Son for us all ?* This justly raises the hope of the returning sinner to believe, that, together with him, he will freely give us all things ; every thing perfective of, and conducive to our true happiness. 'Tis in Christ alone, that we have this manner, this amazing degree of God's love display'd to us ; that he will not only pardon us, but treat us as righteous : for he (Christ) was made sin, or a sin-offering for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, 2 Cor. v. 21. that we, on our being reconciled, might be treated as righteous, might be received into favour as children. And,

though it does not fully appear what we shall be ; yet we know that we shall be like him when we shall see him as he is ; and that, if we are children, we are heirs, and that, to an inheritance uncorrupted, and that fadeth not away, reserved in the heavens for us ; and that even these our vile bodies shall be changed like unto his glorious body, immortal, incorruptible, and spiritual ; no more a clog and hindrance to the exercise of the mind, but fitted to that more exalted service, to which our then perfected natures shall be advanced ; if now, in the days of our probation, we are faithful in the few things committed to our trust. This is the lively hope, to which we christians are begotten through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And,

(2.) As to the degree of this hope, the christian has full assurance of hope ; that is, he has full assurance of room for repentance ; and that every penitent sinner shall obtain remission of sins : for this is now proclaim'd in the name of Jesus, who died for the ungodly. And, in proportion to the evidence he has of his own contrition, and bringing forth the fruits meet for repentance ; he is perswaded of his own acceptance with God : and, if he has the concurrent testimony of his own conscience, and of God's spirit ; he may assure his heart, and have confidence before God, while he discerns in his own spirit, the characteristics that the holy spirit gives of the children of God in the inspired writings. The christian has strong consolation in his fleeing for refuge to the hope that is set before him ; while he beholds our Lord set forth by God, to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of his sins that are past, through the forbearance

bearance of God; that he might be just, and the justifier of him, who believeth in Jesus. And, thus, the fears of the returning sinner are dispel'd; tho' he has an awakened sense of his past guilt, and of God's holiness: for he in the gospel beholds the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world: he is inform'd that his blood was shed for the remission of sins; that we may obtain redemption thro' him, that was made a curse for us, to deliver us from the curse of the law. And, thus, is his faith and hope in the divine mercy strengthen'd while he beholds the love of Christ in dying for us; and that according to the appointment of God the Father, who so loved us, as not to spare, but give his only begotten Son for us; and who was the best judge in what methods to dispense the riches of his grace to us, and to appoint what atonement was most consistent with the rights of his government; and in what method he might most discover his infinite distance from sin, and aversion to all iniquity. And, now, the Christian's faith in a Redeemer being justified, or vindicated by our Lord's resurrection from the dead, while he thus conceives of our Lord as suffering, the just for the unjust; he has strong consolation, even from the veracity and justice of God; because, tho' Christ is God's free gift, and all the blessings of the gospel covenant are to be ultimately ascribed to the free grace of the God and Father of mercies; yet, now, since God has given his Son for us, and called us into the kingdom of grace; the Christian, who penitently confesses his sins, has his hope founded in the justice, and faithfulness of God, that he will both forgive us and cleanse us from all iniquity.

Thus,

Thus, the way of our access unto the Father; and acceptance with him, being now reveal'd; and we having many great and precious promises given us in the revelation of *Jesus Christ*: the consideration hereof must, and indeed naturally does, contribute to raise the hope of the Christian to a full assurance; and administer stronger consolation than is reasonable to be expected, or to be conceiv'd of as arising from the light of nature. And, then, when we add that all this encouragement for hope is attended with the clearest manifestation of God's displeasure against sin, in that he did not chuse to deliver us from our perishing state but by the death of his Son! here is no encouragement to sin; but the most dreadful expectations for the harden'd impenitent sinner. And, when we consider the object of our hope, that it is nothing less than the recovery of our natures to perfection in holiness, and so to compleat happiness in the presence, and favour of the infinitely holy God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity with the least approbation; surely, he, that hath this hope (confirmed by the glorious display of divine mercy, thro' our Redeemer, and by many great and precious promises) must purify himself. For, as the object of his hope is purity; and, as he can never enjoy the object of his hope without purity: so, the more he is refin'd, and purified in his spirit and temper; the more he enjoys at present of the object of his hopes, and the nearer he advances to the state of perfection he is tending towards.

Thus, the revelation of *Jesus* has the advantage of the law of nature; and, considering our circumstances as fallen and sinful, and I may add, dying creatures, is better calculated to bring rest to our souls; and ought to be esteem'd a more
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easy yoke ; as it promotes and greatly facilitates our knowledge of the truths, and duties of natural religion ; as it enlarges our apprehensions of the diviner perfections, particularly of immense goodness, and infinite mercy : and as it brings us to a fuller assurance of hope ; and aggrandizes our ideas of the objects hoped for, beyond what the heart of a sinful creature could possibly conceive without revelation, or could have foundation to expect, supposing the object conceivable.

Nor is there any just objection to be form'd against the peculiar doctrines taught, the peculiar way of worship required, or the positive institutions enjoined in the gospel dispensation, by our Lord, or his inspired Apostles. As to the peculiar doctrines, they are not liable to reasonable objection. Were they contradictory in themselves, or repugnant to natural religion, or tending to licentiousness ; they would be real difficulties ; and would be a just reason for us to refuse our assent : but this cannot be urged against the doctrines certainly taught in the holy scriptures.

(1.) I know not whether it may not be judged impertinent to mention, among these peculiar doctrines, the fall of man, and the degeneracy of human nature ; because it seems evident to every man's reason and conscience, that we are in a state of disorder and imperfection, and that we have all sinned : and therefore supposing we are not able, by the help of revelation, fully to account for the entrance of sin into the world ; it is no just objection against its usefulness, in many respects ; because in one, it leaves us unsatisfied : supposing this, I say, it is no just objection, unless we can give a better account of this matter than the holy scriptures do ; or show the
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manifest and real absurdity in the scripture account. It is no just objection, that our curiosity is not in all respects satisfied. Tho' I cannot but think, the general account in scripture is rather a recommendation of the doctrine, than an objection against it. There is no absurdity in supposing that God made man upright: or that a mutable creature might fall from the perfection of his nature; and, by his own acts, destroy the original harmony between reason and appetite. Neither is it inconceivable that this should be convey'd to posterity. We see, in fact, many disorders derived from immediate parents to their children: so that there is no contradiction in supposing that this should happen in a natural way; nor any injustice to the posterity of *Adam*, that they are all mortal; since immortality, even in a state of innocence, ought rather to be acknowledged as the free gift of God, and what even an innocent creature could lay no claim to. And, if we apprehend any difficulties with respect to the divine goodness, in permitting this degeneracy, they will no more affect reveal'd, than natural religion. Nevertheless, by the help of revelation, especially that of the gospel, we have the fullest, and clearest manifestation of the divine goodness towards such frail and mortal creatures as we now feel our selves to be; in that we have assurance that, as he knows our frame, so he pities us, and suits the terms of his acceptance to our present state. For he is not extreme to mark iniquity; does not insist on unerring indefectible obedience; but admits of repentance for past offences, and sincere unreserved obedience for the future. And, as he knows our weakness, and insufficiency, of our selves, to real holiness; so he is ready to vouchsafe us all needful assistance;
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prevents us with his goodness in the course of his providence, and calls of his grace; and has given the promise of his holy spirit to them that ask him, that they may be enabled to serve him acceptably, and to go on to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. And further, tho' he did not wholly prevent the natural consequences of the fall of *Adam* to himself, or posterity; yet he laid the plan of our full and complete recovery thro' our Lord *Jesus Christ*. So that all, who, by patient continuance in well doing, are seeking after life, and honour, and immortality, shall inherit eternal life. So that all such, tho' they lost in *Adam* an earthly, yet in *Christ* shall they be rais'd to an heavenly paradise; they shall be restored to immortality in the happiest circumstances. For, if, by one man's offence, death reign'd by one: much more they, who receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, *Rom. v. 17*. All the dead shall be raised again by *Christ*: and this will be to the eternal advantage of all that have done well: that is, in the merciful acceptance of doing well, have been faithful, sincere, and unreserv'd in their obedience, from the beginning of their distinguishing between good and evil, or after their breaking off their iniquities by repentance. All this display of the divine goodness shines forth to us in the fullest, clearest, and strongest light in the gospel dispensation. And, what is there in all this, to take exception at? nay is it not rather a recommendation of the gospel dispensation, and what demands our grateful acknowledgements?

(2.) As to our obtaining salvation by *Jesus*, and redemption thro' his blood; this does no way detract from the freeness of divine grace, or lessen our obligations of thankfulness to the God

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and Father of our Lord *Jesus Christ*: since it was of his own essential goodness, and an expression of his free, and unmerited mercy, that he gave up his Son for us, when he did not think fit to receive us into favour as his children, without at the same time expressing his high displeasure against sin: and it was he that appointed, and accepted that atonement. Nor can it with reason be esteem'd an act of injustice to our great Redeemer; because it was with his own consent; who had power to lay down his life, and to take it up again; and who was highly exalted for so doing. And, is not this a further display of the wisdom of God? in that, when, he pleased to discover his immense goodness and mercy towards returning sinners; in his purposes of advancing them to such a state of happiness, as would not have enter'd into the heart of man to have conceiv'd of; yet, he took effectual care to convince us of his infinite distance from the least approbation of sin. God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh. Neither can it be matter of encouragement to sin; because God has manifested his great abhorrence of sin, in this high expression of his mercy to returning sinners; and has expressly assured us that the harden'd, and impenitent sinner hath nothing to expect but the wrath, and fiery indignation of the Almighty. And, can the Christian, who believes the remission of his past sins, and his acceptance with God, to be only in, and thro' him that loved us and dyed for us: can such a one doubt of the peremptory threatenings of that God, who, in the very display of his mercy, has thus manifested his infinite separation from, and abhorrence of all iniquity?

If any professors of Christianity deceive themselves in a vain imagination, that Christ has done all for them; and that they have nothing to do, but heartily to believe that the righteousness of Christ is transferr'd to their account: they greatly err, not knowing the scriptures, nor regarding the divine purity and holiness therein display'd. The righteousness, and death of Christ are, no where in the book of God, represented as vacating the necessity of personal holiness; but rather as a pattern for our imitation, and a confirmation of our acceptance on the terms of faith, repentance, and new obedience; and so, as an encouragement to real holiness, to the utmost of our capacity, in the hope of acceptance with God; who is, indeed, not extreme to mark iniquity; and who will not reject us for sins repented of, or for unavoidable failings, and infirmities not indulged: but who has manifested his love of righteousness, and compassionately entreats our reconciliation to him, (to his government) without which, we are sufficiently and clearly inform'd, we can never be admitted into his favour. So that our faith will be estimated as dead, and never be allowed as a just claim for our admission to eternal life; unless it be perfected by works; unless we act agreeably to the faith we are taught by the Gospel. For, though we neither pretend to claim eternal life, by the righteousness of the ceremonial law; nor by the law of innocence, as tho' we were perfect and unerring in our obedience; nor by the merit of any thing we can do: yet it must be, if ever we would claim a right, on our compliance with the Gospel terms. We freely and thankfully acknowledge that eternal life is the free gift of God; and that we could never lay claim to it, but by divine grant: nay, the salvation, describ'd in the

Gospel is so great; that, if we were innocent, it would exceed our hopes, and be beyond what we could claim; unless by virtue of divine promise: but we can never claim even a promise, without complying with the condition plainly implied, and annex'd to the promise. Now the Gospel as plainly calls us to repentance, as it proclaims remission of sins in the name of *Jesus*; nay calls us to repentance from those sins God winked at in the times of ignorance. And, as we are assur'd that the pure in heart shall see God; so we are ascertain'd, that, without holiness, no man shall see the Lord. These things are so plainly, and so frequently inculcated in the sacred pages; that the follies of any Christians, with reference hereunto, cannot in reason be objected against revelation. Nay the matter is so plainly inculcated, that it is not to be conceiv'd that any, who own the authority of the Gospel, can resist the light of it in this point, unless they be such as love darkness rather than light. I do not say that some pious persons may not have express'd themselves darkly, confusedly, and dangerously too, on this affair: but that they cannot resist the evidence of the necessity of real personal holiness; it shines so brightly in the Gospel.

(3.) As to the doctrines of *future rewards and punishments*; they are fitted to the nature and state of man, who is influenced by hope and fear; and is liable to receive impressions from the allurements, and terrors, to which he is obnoxious in this life, and by which we are often in danger of departing from the paths of virtue.

They, who object against *such motives* to virtue, do not rightly consider the nature of man; for there are desires and aversions, pleasures and pains, natural to our present state: and since we cannot

cannot be unsensible of pain and disgrace, and may be expos'd to them on the very account of righteousness; it seems agreeable to our notions of God's goodness, to set before us future happiness or misery, as a relief to our weakness, and as a balance to such present discouragements. Nor can any man be look'd upon as criminal-ly mercenary, who, in his virtuous actions, has an eye to the recompence of reward that is set before him: for, he acts agreeably to his own nature, and to the will of God: nor will such a conduct be injurious to virtue: neither is it unworthy of God to propose such motives.

Indeed, if the motives of religion were entirely heterogeneous from virtue: (as suppose a man was religious, and practis'd great self-denial, and submitted to many hardships for a while, merely with the hope of being rich, and of having it more in his power to indulge his appetites, and passions hereafter) this might be esteem'd mercenary and hurtful to virtue: but the great object of the Christian's hope is the perfection of virtue; of becoming himself perfect; of being free from all deprav'd inclinations, exempted from vicious snares, and wicked company, having fellowship with perfected spirits; and of enjoying the favour of the infinitely holy God. Now what is there unsuitable to a rational mind, to be influenced by such hopes? One would think that they, who talk'd most for being virtuous for the sake of virtue, cannot be offended with such a motive to holiness. For, such hopes entertain'd are consistent with, and do imply our being virtuous for the sake of virtue. For, while we are animated with such motives, what is it but being virtuous under difficulties, in the hope of becoming perfectly virtuous? and perfectly

fectly happy, when exempted from such difficulties? And, what is more justly the object of our dread, than to be banish'd from the presence of God, and the harmony of Heaven, to the anguish of an accusing conscience, and the confusion of the realms of darkness?

Should any contend for such a notion of divine goodness, as makes no distinction between good and evil; they would set up one attribute to the destruction of another. For, while they seem to exalt the divine goodness, they forget his wisdom and holiness; and are either quarrelling with the Almighty for making us what we are; rational and free agents, accountable for, and conscious of our actions; or they subvert the wisdom, and holiness of God, in supposing his government over us not suitable to our natures. For, as we are such creatures, impiety, and a neglect of the laws of our creation, will naturally and unavoidably bring us into misery. Now, though he, that delights not in the death of a sinner, exercises his patience; and, by various methods, excites us to consider our ways, that we may turn and live: yet, to suppose the goodness of God so undistinguished, as to make no difference between the righteous, and wicked; nay, by omnipotent power to prevent the natural consequences of harden'd impiety (which must be suppos'd, considering our natures, if good and evil are to be alike happy) this is unworthy of the holiness of God, and injurious to his wisdom, in placing us under laws, by which we are not to be govern'd. And, to suppose all this, would, if believ'd, take off the restraints of vice, open the flood-gates of profaness; and so be destructive to moral goodness among men, who are certainly influenced by hopes and fears; and, consequently,

quently, would be subversive of God's goodness, now discover'd in the moral sanctions added to his laws, which are admirably fitted to prevent men (in a way consistent with their natures) from wickedness, which is unavoidably attended with misery. Therefore the sanctions of rewards, and punishments (which are, I think, deducible from natural religion; but most clearly annex'd to the precepts of revealed religion,) are so far from being objections against divine goodness; that they are to us, consider'd as we really are (*viz.* free agents, liable to err, and apt to be too much impressed by sensible objects) these sanctions, I say, are, to us, expressions of divine goodness, fitted to promote our true interest, by exciting us to such a course, as will certainly terminate in our eternal happiness; and prevent that misery, which is the natural consequence of a course of wickedness and impenitency. And,

As to the threatening of *everlasting destruction* from the presence of the Lord, or an eternal miserable state of existence (which, I own seems implied in the gospel representation of the future state of impenitent sinners; *for their worm shall not die, &c.*) though this, I say, does indeed carry in it a great deal of terror to our thoughts: yet, perhaps, it will not appear unreasonable to believe: if we consider the soul of the sinner immortal by the law of its creation; and its misery the natural effect of its choice; and that a soul, continuing in a state of enmity to the law and authority of its creator, must continue miserable: neither of which can, I think, be prov'd impossible. And, if we observe both the perverseness of some mens choice, and their obstinate adherence to what they have per-

perverſly choſen ; maugre all the manifeſt inconveniences attending their obſtinacy : hereby declaring they place their chief happineſs in the gratifications of their own wills : we may conceive of it, as poſſible that they ſhould be both miſerable and yet impenitent under their miſery. Now if all this is ſuppoſable, namely, that the ſoul of man is naturally immortal, and that men may become ſo wicked as to continue obſtinate in their enmity againſt the law, and authority of God : then, why ſhould we think God obliged to alter the laws of his creation in favour of rebellious ſpirits ? Exiſtence is a benefit, and ſo is the continuance of being, in it ſelf conſider'd ; tho' it may be, accidentally, better never to have been. Now our exiſtence, and our immortality are both from God : but the evil, the miſerable ſtate of our exiſtence is from our ſelves. So riches are an advantage ; and yet they are often, eventually, to the hurt of the owners : but they are to be blamed who make ſuch a pernicious uſe of them ; and not the gift deſpiſed, or the goodneſs of the giver called in queſtion. So, it is the ſinner's own fault that his exiſtence is become miſerable : and, why ſhould God be blam'd for creating him immortal, when this was an excellency, and might have been to his great happineſs ; had he not hated to be reform'd ? And, why muſt it be thought neceſſary that God ſhould exert his immediate power to put an end to his exiſtence, who has himſelf render'd it miſerable ; and that, after patience exercis'd towards him, and, eſpecially, when his being left to the natural conſequences of his guilt, may answer a wiſe end in the divine adminiſtration, and the very apprehenſion hereof is an awful means to reſtrain us from ſin ? As

to what positive evils may be inflicted on the damn'd; we may be sure they will be with weight and measure, and in a just proportion to the degrees of guilt and malignity contracted. If we really believe the eternal misery of the wicked, there can be no more forcible motive to awaken us to consider our ways: nay, if we believe it but possible; we shall employ our time much better in improving the intimations of this dismal state; so as to avoid it by a thorough turning from wickedness, and the practice of universal holiness; than by quarrelling with the divine government, or indulging a vain curiosity: and then, we shall acknowledge such intimations as mercifully intended to prevent our misery.

The doctrine of the *resurrection* of the body, and that every one shall receive his own body, is by no means incredible; nor can any philosophical difficulties, that may be started, be of any weight, where omnipotence, and infinite wisdom stand engag'd for the performance; to which nothing is impossible, that does not imply a contradiction; as to cause a thing to be, and not to be at the same time: but, to collect and raise the scatter'd atoms of dead bodies, implies no such contradiction; nor is it beyond the power or skill of the Almighty, to preserve the principal constituents of one humane body from being so mix'd with, as to become the like to another humane body.

Nor does the glorious change of our bodies at the resurrection imply any contradiction to every ones receiving his own body; no more than the most diseas'd body of any living person, would now cease to be that person's body, tho' changed into the most athletic, by the removal of all gross

humours, and by restoring the animal system to the most complete order and harmony. And, methinks this is so far from being impossible, that there are sundry things, both in nature, and art, that may facilitate our belief and apprehension of it. Thus, we see, to use *St. Paul's* comparison, the seed, which is sown, tho' it dies, loses its form, is changed, expanded, and receives nourishment for growth from the moisture of the earth; yet, from every seed springs up the same grain, or its own body; and we readily believe, when we see a field of wheat, for instance; that the wheat so grown up, springs from those very grains of wheat, that were there sown, and not from the mere clods of earth, or any different seed. So, in the change we observe in the silk-worm or caterpillar, from a creeping to a flying insect; we readily believe the body of the butterfly is the same body as once had the form of a caterpillar, and not the body of another insect, as a snail, or the like. And, thus, we believe glass to be made of the particles of sand, and ashes, melted and refin'd by the intense heat of fire; and that glass is made, or produced from some particular particles of sand, &c. that are so refin'd by fire: and, why may I not then believe that I shall receive my own body, tho' gloriously chang'd, and fitted for the very different and more exalted state, and service above; and that, by the power of him that is able to subdue all things to himself; and of which I am confirm'd by his own resurrection from the dead; yea and rejoice in the belief of my complete recovery to immortality. And, then, the greatness of the change, as it will render the blessing more complete: so, as it will be such a change as will render it fitted for the state and employment above; it is not liable to the

the objection, that would attend the supposition of its being raised unchanged, and, in all respects, what it now is; which would be unsuitable to the future state. And, why should this be thought incredible by any, who believe and consider the power of God.

As to the belief we are to have concerning *the Father, and Son, and holy Spirit*, in whose names we are baptised; I shall have occasion to say as much as falls in with my present design; and as much as I conceive to be necessary for us to believe, in order to our practice, and acceptance with God. While I attempt,

2. To vindicate the *peculiar way of worship* required under the Gospel. And, here is nothing required, that is just occasion of offence: nothing, that appears incongruous to the divine perfections to enjoin, or unworthy of men to comply with; nothing, that looks like the conduct of an arbitrary being, that acts by mere will, humour, and caprice in his injunctions.

That we are to worship God in spirit, and in truth, I take for granted, is not liable to any objection. And, that we are to worship the God and Father of all, in, and thro' the mediation of our Lord *Jesus Christ*; one would hardly think should be made an objection, when we consider how many mediators men were prone in the state of *Gentilism* to devise to themselves.

That there should be a *Mediator* appointed between an infinitely holy God, and depraved sinful creatures, carries nothing in it repugnant to the natural apprehensions of such as are conscious of their own vileness and nothingness, compared with the transcendent purity and glory of the divine Majesty. That our Lord *Jesus Christ* should be declared the Mediator, and our worship directed

to the Father, in, and thro' him, will not be esteem'd unreasonable to those, who consider him according to the scripture revelation: nor is a revelation, so attested, to be refused, or the accounts, therein given, rejected; unless they imply a contradiction to natural truth or moral goodness: which, I presume, can never be proved as to the matter before us, if we will but rest satisfied with the scripture declarations. Now, he is there represented not only as the person who was with God (the Father) in the beginning, but is also stiled God, *John i. 1.* and, agreeably hereunto, we are inform'd that God made the worlds by him, and without him was nothing made that was made; yea and that all things were made by him, and for him, *Col. i. 16.* And is he not then, in reason, the proper person, for God to govern the worlds by? and when all this is made known to us; what is more reasonable than that we should acknowledge him as such? And, since, he by whom God made all things, condescended to become incarnate, to be made of a woman, made under the law; and, tho' before his incarnation he was in the form of God, being the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person: since he not only was made a little lower than the Angels by becoming a man, and so naturally capable of dying; but, in our nature, took on him the form of a servant, minister'd to our wants; set us an example of righteousness; and tho' he was without sin, and so not on his own account liable to the sentence of the law (*the soul that sinneth shall dye*) yet became obedient to death; dying, the just for the unjust; and making *his soul an offering for sin, that we might be made, or treated as, righteous.* Since the only Begotten of the Father, thus, condescended to empty himself: what

what more reasonable than that he should be highly exalted? And, what more suitable than that God should dispense the riches of his grace and glory thro' him? And commit the judgment of the world to him? and, then, since he is thus highly exalted; has all power in heaven and earth given to him; hath life in himself; can raise whom he will; hath the words of eternal life, &c. what more reasonable than that we should acknowledge him as our only Mediatour with God, who has put all things in subjection to him? That all men honour him; that every knee should bow before him; and every tongue confess that *Jesus Christ* is LORD to the glory of GOD the FATHER? And, has not the Christian who worships God the Father thro' the mediation of his dear Son, a holy boldness in his approaches to the throne of the divine majesty? while he considers this Mediatour as the righteous advocate, as our glorious high priest, who ever lives, and makes intercession for all that come unto God by him, and who can compassionate our infirmities, and is able to save all such unto the uttermost: and is he not assur'd, that this faith is no fiction, by the resurrection of his Lord? by the descent of the holy Ghost? and by the success of the gospel? These things consider'd, our regard to *Jesus Christ*, tho' we are commanded thereunto by God the Father, is not to be esteem'd as a mere arbitrary command: but as being agreeable to the relation he stands in to us, and to the whole creation. And, hence, not only men are commanded to honour the Son, as they honour the Father; but the Angels of God are commanded to worship him: for he (God) hath not put the world to come in subjection to them (the Angels) but to him, whom God has anointed with the oil of gladness

ness above his fellows. Compare *Pf.* xlv. with *Heb.* i. and ii.

The like may be said with reference to *the holy Ghost*: if he is God's resident in the Church; if he bare witness to the gospel dispensation, by many signs and wonders; if he is the *sanctifier of believers in all ages*; and sustains this office in the oeconomy of salvation: then our regard to him as such, is not to be consider'd merely as an act of obedience to a positive precept, but agrees also with the reason and relation of things: and when this is known, every one must see it reasonable not to quench, resist, or do despite to *the spirit of grace and holiness*; but, on the contrary to pray for his guidance and assistance, improve every good motion, and encourage himself with the hope of his promised aid, in a resolute course of piety, as knowing that he that is in us, is greater than he that is in the world.

Thus, I think, we may justly say of the peculiar way of worshipping the Father thro' the Son, and by the holy Spirit; that, tho' it is a command of revelation, and their peculiar offices are only made known by revelation: yet that this was not unworthy of God to reveal, but of manifest advantage for us to be inform'd of; and that the duties, subsequent hereunto, or the way of worship now required, tho' it is the will and pleasure of God to be worship'd in this manner; yet it does also arise from, or at least is perfectly consistent with the reason and relation of things; and that, so long as these offices and relations last will oblige men wherever known; and are so far from being a reasonable objection, that they are worthy of all acceptation: as they are an illustrious manifestation of the divine condescension, and goodness to us; and admirably contrived to animate,

mate, and support us in a religious course. And so do contribute to render the yoke of *Christ* light and easy compared with the law of nature.

3. Nor is it a just occasion of offence, that there should be *positive institutions* in revealed religion; because they may be calculated for wise purposes, and suited to our nature and present circumstances. Such institutions may have a direct tendency to fix on our minds a sense of the authority, and to engage us to an explicate obedience to the will of God. And, may not every institution that has such a tendency, be of advantage to us? Especially when there is sufficient caution in the revelation enjoining such institutions, to guard us against a neglect of morality. And, as it conduceth to the happiness of a rational creature to be subjected to, and harmoniz'd with the divine will; so, may it not be an evidence that the person, so obeying, does it from a hearty subjection to the will of God? And, tho' this can never be allowed as a commutation for, or an indulgence to the neglect of moral virtue: yet, in some cases, such obedience may be more explicitly an acknowledgement of God's authority, than some instances of morality; which may be perform'd from their being agreeable, and suitable to our happiness, while we have not so express a regard to the will of God. Tho' it must be allow'd that to live in the allowed neglect of moral virtue is most heinous, and more incompatible with the love of God, and virtue, and can have less to be said in excuse of it, than a mistake in matter of positive religion, or the omission of them will many times admit of: yet these may answer a valuable end; and may be well suited to train us up, and to habituate us to an obedient disposition of mind. And, when they are neither numerous,
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nor obscure in their design ; but their moral tendency is plain and obvious, which is the case of the gospel institutions : why should this be thought below the majesty or perfection of God to enjoin ?

Baptism is an admission into the Church, and is plainly design'd to show us our need of purity, and cleansing by the blood of *Jesus*, and by the Spirit of our God ; and of our obligation to die unto sin, and to live in the service of the true God. And, since we are expressly told that the outward sign will be of no advantage without the thing signified, for *the baptism that now saves us, is not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards, or a good conscience enquiring of, God*, 1 Pet. iii. 21. Why should an institution, but once to be practis'd, so plain in its design, and so guarded against abuse, be objected against ?

And with respect to the *Lord's Supper* ; what can be more simple, or more obvious in its design, or less apt to lead any to superstition ? The express and declar'd design is the remembrance of the death of *Christ* ; of his body, as broken for us, of his blood, as shed for the remission of sins. By which (1.) If we understand our own thankful remembrance of the love of *Christ* in dying for us : what can be more reasonable than for us frequently to have an affecting sense of his love ? And, what can have a greater tendency to constrain us to live unto him that dyed for us, than the frequent remembrance of his death ? And, as living to him must mean living in obedience to the will of God as taught by him, and in conformity to his example ; and as this expression of *Christ's* love excites us to love one another : this ordinance has a plain moral tendency, and may be conceiv'd as appointed to assist us in the practice

practice of virtue, by strongly exciting us to the love of God, and our neighbour. (2.) If we consider it as publickly shewing forth the Lord's death, till he come; and so as one means of preserving the remembrance of it in the world: why should we think this an unreasonable return of respect to him, that loved us, and dyed for us? and, while Christians are oblig'd to such a public profession of their faith in a crucified Saviour: this may answer a good end, in preserving, and propagating the belief hereof, and in visibly distinguishing his church from the infidel and profane part of the world; and in reminding them of their obligation to be crucified to the world, since they are professedly of a kingdom that is not of this world, and the declar'd subjects of a crucified Saviour. (3.) Or if we suppose, lastly, that this implies the bringing the death of *Christ* to remembrance before God: this has an evident tendency to advance us to an holy boldness, and a confirm'd faith in our approaches to the throne of mercy. -----

Yet this act of remembrance is to be kept up by no other outward forms than plain bread and wine; suitable, as they are the ordinary means of supporting and exhilarating animal life, to lead us to consider our Lord *Jesus Christ*, as the bread of life that cometh from above, and as the person thro' whom we have eternal life and the joys of salvation; and yet not so liable to be abus'd to superstition, as some other methods more immediately striking our senses, and natural affections. For instance, a curious representation, in statuary, or painting, of a person hanging on a cross in the agonies of death, might indeed be more striking to our imagination: but, perhaps, while we felt the stronger commotions of our passions, we should

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have our thoughts less engaged on the real and great ends of our Lord's death, and be more in danger of superstition. It is evident the *Roman* church departed from the gospel simplicity of this institution, and chang'd the nature of the sacrament; or she could never have idoliz'd the Host.

But, what is there offensive in these institutions, consider'd in their original simplicity, and obvious design? Why may not God enjoin such ordinances; when very good ends are proposed to be answer'd by them, and they are design'd to promote real holiness? God's thus dealing with us ought not to be represented as a mere arbitrary proceeding, but rather as a merciful condescension to our infirmities, thus to treat us in a way of covenant; while we, obeying these institutions, and attending to the design of them, are encouraged to regard our selves as his peculiar people.

By Baptism, we come under or enter into a visible profession of being his people: and by the Lord's supper we solemnly renew this profession; and are put in mind of our obligations; and, by his appointing these external signs, and seals of his covenant, he does as it were own us for his people in a public manner. His truth and essential goodness are ever the same, and may be a just argument for our trust in him: but our weakness is such, that it may be an advantage to us that God does thus, by external signs, declare his taking us into covenant; and hereby authorises us to regard our selves as his peculiar people; if we observe, on our part, the covenant, and depart from iniquity. And, as these institutions, and the dispensation we are under, have a tendency to real holiness: so we may expect, and be confirm'd in our hopes of all that help from God, that is truly needful to render us not only holy or devoted by solemn

solemn profession ; but truly a holy people, separate from all iniquity, if we are not negligent of making this our calling and election sure, or abiding. For, as we are devoted to the Father ; so likewise we are baptised in the name of the Son, whose blood cleanseth from all sin ; and into the name of the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, and so into the expectation and hope of his sanctifying, and saving operations.

Thus, while we are discharged from the numerous rites of the *Jewish* law ; and, are brought under a dispensation not at all insisting on those meats and drinks, and ceremonial observances they were obliged to ; and which compar'd with that law, does not insist on positive institutions, (these being both fewer, and more plain, and obvious ; and so suited to this better covenant and more perfect dispensation ; and yet not improper to our state of imperfection, and probation, whilst in a sinful world, till the time comes, when we shall need them no more ; when we shall be admitted to that state, where we shall see as we are seen ; where the glory of God, and the Lamb shall enlighten us, and where there will be no need of the light of the sun or the moon, nor the aids of positive institutions be more requisite) it becomes us in the mean time to walk in all the ordinances, and commandments of the Lord blameless ; to show an unreserv'd subjection to the will of God ; and carefully to improve all those helps, that are suited to our present state : rather than indulge our selves in a cavilling humour.

I now proceed to consider the objection against all revealed religion, because it is *not universal*. If this is such a mighty benefit, it is said, how comes it that a God of infinite goodness has not render'd it more extensive ? What if I should say,

the true reason why men are not more universally aided by revelation, is, because they delighted no more to retain, and improve the aids of revelation, than the natural knowledge of God in their minds. This was the first occasion of revelation ceasing to be universal. On the authority of Scripture, we may affirm that revelation has been universal: that, in the beginning, God treated with men on the foot of revelation; as with *Adam* in paradise, and after the fall; and again with *Noah*, who would instruct his children. Now, if, when revelation was universal, men grew more and more negligent of its aids and directions, and fond of their own inventions; it is natural to suppose they might, by degrees, lose the knowledge of it; or so corrupt it, as to have little benefit thereby. And, if God saw fit, when they delighted not to retain his knowledge in their minds, to abandon them to their own follies; might not this, tho' a permitting them to the natural consequence of their own choice, answer a wise end in the course of providence; as a caution to others, and an excitement to improve their advantage; lest the like evil should happen to them: and this, without consigning their posterity, for successive ages, down to the regions of everlasting misery, merely for the want of those religious helps, that their ancestors sin'd away, unless they approv'd their ways. An infinitely merciful God will not require from men according to what they have not; but according to what they enjoy. So, the revelation of *Jesus* teaches us Christians to judge. God is alone the proper Judge of what allowances are to be made. He knows the degrees of liberty men are possess'd of; and every disadvantage they are under; and what degree of purity and holiness is requisite to their admission
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to his favour; and what darkness and error may, under particular circumstances, be consistent therewith. The righteous Judge of all the earth will, in equity judge the nations.

Nor is it reasonable to suppose any sincere persons should be destitute of such helps to religion, as are necessary to advance them to a meetness for happiness. As the Heathens are not left without a witness: so, if they attend to the light enjoy'd, how much soever that light may be darken'd by vain traditions; yet, as, under the Gospel, to him that hath shall be given: so we have no reason to doubt of proportional assistance to him that improves what he hath by the light of nature. This we know, by the authority of revelation, that, of every nation, he, that feareth God, and worketh righteousness is accepted of him: and *St. Paul*, who gives us such a sad description of the general state of the heathen world, in the beginning of his epistle to the *Romans*; in his second chapter speaks of them, as having thoughts accusing, or else excusing one another; and tells us that, if by nature, they do the things of the law, they are a law to themselves; and that, if they keep the (moral) righteousness of the law; their uncircumcision shall be counted for circumcision: so that we have no need to damn the heathens, in order to magnify the gospel.

Yet I would further observe, that the influence of revelation has not been so restrain'd as perhaps some imagine. It is evident that the conduct of providence to the family of *Abraham*, and the nation of the *Jews*, was such as contributed to make God's name known among the *Gentiles*, and in some measure to preserve true religion among the nations. His house was a house of prayer for all nations; and, among the *Gentiles*, there were
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not wanting some, that came up to worship at the court of the *Gentiles* ; tho' they receiv'd not the *Jewish* dispensation ; and, what could such conduct imply less than their acknowledging the God of *Israel* for the true God, in contradistinction to the gods of the nations ? and, did not their so doing bear witness to others of their belief in the only living and true God ? Nor is it at all unreasonable to suppose that those, that did not go so far, might receive advantage from revelation ; even tho' they did not avowedly receive it, as the rule of their practice. Thus they might have assistance from the traditional remains of revelation, in some important truths, and duties, handed down to them ; which approved themselves indeed to their consciences, and so might be esteem'd parts of natural religion, and yet they might, in a great degree, owe their knowledge of them, to their being communicated down from one age to another : nay, they might have more easily an opportunity of correcting their false and absurd notions, by the communications they had from those who were guided by a standing revelation. I think this is pretty evident in the reformation made among the *Magi* by *Zoroaster*, with respect to the absurd, and abominable notion of two independent principles, the one good, the other evil. And so, likewise, their reformation from vice, and preservation from a total degeneracy might be very much ascrib'd to the same cause. It seems very plain, that the repentance of *Nineveh*, was to be imputed to the alarm given them by the threatenings of a Prophet sent from God, and not to the mere attention of their own minds to the light of nature. And, once more,

There is no reason to forbid our extending the benefit of our Redeemer's death to such as may
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not have been favour'd with the explicate revelation of him. The name of *Jesus*, we Christians ought readily to acknowledge, is the only name given under heaven, whereby a man can be saved; but I think the scripture does not confine salvation, only to such as have the explicate knowledge of his name, who is the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Indeed, we read that he, that believeth not is damn'd: and our Lord tells the *Jews*, *Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.* But such expressions must, in the reason of things, be restrained to those, who having sufficient evidence of his being the *Messiah*, yet thro' a love of vice refuse to acknowledge him, or to act suitably to such acknowledgements: and, in like manner when it is said, *Whosoever denieth the Son, hath not the Father, &c. He, that hath the Son, hath life, and, He that hath not the Son of God, hath not life.* These, and the like expressions, must be restrain'd to those, to whom the Son of God was explicitly propos'd: unless any rather suppose the latter passage to refer to that abundant, that eminent degree of spiritual life, that they have, who duly receive the Son of God. It is plain such passages cannot be intended as a peremptory exclusion from happiness of all such persons, as have not a direct explicate faith in the person of our Lord *Jesus Christ*: our Saviour himself pronounced concerning *Nathaniel*, when he had no explicate faith in his person, but was rather under popular prejudices; that *he was an Israelite indeed; in whom there was no guile*: and *St. Paul* expressly asserts, that, *as in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive*, 1 Cor. xv. 22. But now the resurrection from the dead, (for of that the Apostle is speaking) cannot be design'd as a misery,

misery, unless render'd such by people's own fault. All Christians allow that infants, who have no explicate faith, may have benefit by the death of our Lord: nor is it natural to suppose the heathens should so far share in the effect of our Lord's death and power, as to be rais'd from the dead, only in order to be the more miserable. But St. Paul tells us that, *as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law; in the day when God shall judge the secrets of all men by Jesus Christ, Rom. ii. 12. --- 16.* And, since, in the preceding verses, he asserts that God shall render to every man according to his works; and pronounces happiness or misery, accordingly, to all, whether *Jew* or *Gentile*: I think it most natural to understand him, when he asserts that all men shall be judged by *Jesus Christ* according to his Gospel; as asserting not only that 'tis according to what the gospel teaches, that all men shall be judged by *Jesus Christ*; but also that all men shall be judged according to the merciful tenour of the gospel; which does not insist on indefectible, unerring obedience, but admits of repentance, and accepts sincere and unreserv'd obedience; and this, perfectly agreeable to his supposing some by patient continuance in well doing to be seeking glory; in contradistinction to the contentious; which supposition would be vain, if all the *Gentiles* were of the latter sort. All, indeed, have come short of the glory of God: and, since spotless obedience is no where to be found; it is reasonable to understand sincere obedience to be that, which ranks persons among the well doers. And, thus, all men, according to their conscientious regard to, and improvement of, the dispensation they are favour'd with, whether
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under the Gospel; the law of *Moses*, the revelation given to the *Patriarchs*, or the light of nature; may be judg'd according to the merciful tenor of the Gospel by *Jesus Christ*. It is manifest, none can be damned, for not believing in him of whom they have never heard: neither have they the same advantage for holiness in this life: and, as it is probable they do not attain the same degree of purity in this life, as the serious careful Christian; so it is possible they may not be immediately advanced to the same degree of glory in the future state. For, in our heavenly Father's house there are many mansions: yet they may be surpris'd with admission into mansions of glory beyond their expectation, thro' the Redeemer; just as a minor, when he comes to age, may be admitted to an estate beyond his expectations; and that, by virtue of the will of a testator whom he never personally knew. And, tho' the thought hereof can have no present influence on their lives, who do not know it: yet, when they see their obligations to the Mediator, it may be a just occasion for their joining in the other world in the ascriptions of salvation and praise to him, that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain.

Thus I have endeavour'd to shew the extensive usefulness of revealed religion; and the excellency, and great advantage of the revelation of *Jesus Christ* to us, in our circumstances: and that, in a way consistent with the general goodness of the God and Father of mercies; so that no injustice can be charged on the divine administration, to those, who do not enjoy the unmerited favour of the Gospel: which to suppose, I confess, would be an insuperable objection. For every mouth must be stop'd before God in the day of judgment; and that, from a full conviction of the righteous proceedings of that day.

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And,

And, if all this does not satisfy, but men will still ask, why are not all men favour'd with equal advantages? let them give a reason why men were not created angels; or why, on the supposition of our having only the light of nature, yet certainly some men have great advantage above others in natural capacities, education, and other circumstances.

We have reason to believe in general, that God has wise reasons, for his various conduct to the sons of men, from the traces of his wisdom that do appear to us; tho' he has not thought fit to acquaint us with his matters, or reasons of state; and we are incapable of penetrating the abyfs of his counsels: for, who hath been his counsellour? or who can, by searching, find out the Almighty to perfection? surely, it does not become us to reply against God, why hast thou made me thus? but to act agreeably to the laws he has placed us under; and to improve the talents he intrusts us with; and to acknowledge that he has a right to have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and to harden whom he will: because as the infinitely wise God, he is the alone proper Judge how far it is reasonable, all things consider'd, to lengthen out his patience: or to determine when his spirit shall no longer strive with the children of men; and how far it is proper in his righteous judgment, to abandon them to their own follies, and to give them up to their own inventions; and, both when, and how far, it is decorous for his goodness, guided by wisdom; to interpose by extraordinary methods, to prevent the universal wreck of humane nature; as also to determine the fittest methods to be taken, to accomplish so merciful a purpose. But, surely, it can be no reasonable objection against revelation, or what will justify our rejecting it; that God has not thought

thought fit, to acquaint us with these his matters ; when the revelation propos'd, appears, every way worthy of a God of infinite goodness to give, and worthy of man to comply with ; mercifully adapted to his present circumstances, and calculated to promote his happiness, by recovering and perfecting his nature ; and to bring in universal righteousness, and peace on earth, if comply'd with ; and this confirm'd by many signs and wonders, and by the accomplishment of prophecies. Let us all, therefore, take heed that we resist not the Holy Ghost, in rejecting the attestations he has given, by prophecy and miracle, to this dispensation ; lest we be found putting away the salvation of God from us, and rejecting his counsels ; and so the words of our Saviour to the infidel *Jews* be verified on us, who have so much demonstration for this way of salvation : *Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.* Let us rather act a more reasonable part ; and not indulge to endless cavils : but, being satisfied with full and rational evidence, thankfully embrace the Gospel ; with reverence attend to the instructions of the Son of God ; and take heed that we receive not this grace of God in vain. For, how can we escape, if we neglect such great salvation ? I now proceed,

§. III. Thirdly, to show the excellency of the Gospel dispensation, compar'd with the *inventions of men* in the worship of God. And, here, we may say as *David*, in another case, it is better to fall into the hands of God, than into the hands of man : yea, it is better to trust in the Lord, and submit to his guidance, than to lean to our own understanding : because, when once persons forsake the rule of natural and reveal'd religion, they are in danger of endless wandrings ; and 'tis

hard to determine to what length the vagaries of imagination may lead men, according to their different tempers : either to impious and cruel, or lewd actions. Horrid were the abominations of *Gentilism* ; and their idols almost endless : but, by the Gospel dispensation, we behold an end put to all their cruel sacrifices. Wherever the Gospel is admitted in its clearness and authority, men must see they are needless : and all pretence for them is remov'd ; because we know, that, by the once offering of himself, *Jesus Christ* doth perfect for ever them that are sanctified. The like effect has the due consideration of our Lord's mediatorial office, with respect to the idol mediators of the *Gentiles*.

We have another instance of the terrible effects of the inventions of men, in the *Roman Church* : in which, men, departing from the simplicity of the Gospel, ran at length, into extravagancies to the establishment of the papal authority ; which has brought in a yoke more intolerable than that of *Moses* ; and which, instead of preserving the knowledge, and practice of true religion, has heathenised the church ; and brought in gross idolatry, enforced on men by the most cruel methods. The spirit of the meek, and holy *Jesus* has been utterly neglected by multitudes : for I would not condemn every individual in that communion. Some, doubtless, may, in a great degree, be preserv'd from her defilements : but I speak of what is the true and genuine spirit of that church ; in which the law of God has been made void by the traditions of men. Thus has charity, the end of the commandment, been destroyed, thro' a fondness to men's own inventions, and an imperious spirit ; which, when attended with power, has not only produc'd hatred, but the murder of their innocent and righteous brethren : and this, under the

the sanction of religion ; and esteem'd as meritorious. Long pilgrimages, horrid crusadoes, and dreadful massacres ! These are a part of the yoke, that church has laid upon her votaries. From such specimens of humane inventions, join'd with humane authority in matters of religion, let us guard against all approaches to such a spirit ; and see the reasonableness of standing fast in the liberty, wherewith Christ has made us free ; since his yoke is of so contrary a nature, and much more easy to every one, that forms his notions of our Lord's government from the *New Testament*. And, happy would it be for the christian world, if all parties of Christians would unite in giving up every religious doctrine, and practice, that is not founded on that authority ; and in the exercise of charity and mutual forbearance in those lesser matters, wherein they may have different apprehensions ; while all united, in zeal for the essential constituents of our Redeemer's kingdom, righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. And here, I add,

Let not any one foolishly charge the *vices* of men to God's account ; because men have wilfully neglected or notoriously corrupted a revelation, given to quite different purposes than those, it was naturally fitted to produce. For, this is virtually quarrelling with God ; for making us mutable creatures ; instead of thankfully improving the helps afforded us. Neither is it reasonable to turn the *follies* of men, in inventing false, and superstitious methods of religion, into an argument against the admission of all revelation. For that would be no greater security against the corrupt imaginations of men. To say the truth, neither reason, nor revelation, will render us necessary agents, or render us immutable and impeccable. If it be said, that, had men adher'd

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to the dictates of reason ; superstition would have been avoided : in like manner, say I, had men been govern'd by authentick revelation, in matters of religion ; the same would have been prevented. But, it is certain, that both reason, and revelation may be neglected. Let us suppose, for argument's sake, that there never has been any instituted religion of divine appointment. Why, then, it is evident, reason has not, in fact, been effectual to guard against superstition ; and, therefore, tho' there have been false pretences to inspiration, and much mischief done thereby ; yet, since this has actually been the case, whether we suppose a true revelation to have been given or no ; I can't see how the cause of reveal'd religion is affected hereby, farther then to put men upon enquiring into the internal characteristics, and the external evidence of what is propos'd to them as divine revelation ; but cannot in justice, be admitted as a reason to deny the possibility of revelation, which may answer valuable ends ; especially, when in the revelation offer'd, there is no objection against the evidence attending it. But, if it further appears, that it is to be ascribed to revelation, that superstition has not been more spreading, that particularly the Gospel, in its first promulgation, was remarkably successful in recovering men from superstition ; if also the reformation of Christianity is to be ascrib'd to the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, which I think is pretty evident : then how unreasonable is it to object, against revelation that, which it has been destructive of ?

I think I can't do justice to this subject without showing,

§. IV. Fourthly, that the yoke of Christ is easier, and his burthen lighter, than the being under the power of *vicious habits*, and in bondage to Satan.

This

This is perhaps one of the hardest things to persuade men to believe. If this point was therefore once gain'd; we might hope to prevail with people to submit to the authority, and government of our Lord *Jesus Christ*. Now this I apprehend will appear from the following considerations.

First, As much as men are^d inclined to sensual pleasure, and to criminal methods of gratifying their predominant passions: yet there is a contrary principle that gives them uneasiness, at least 'till they have arrived to a fearedness of conscience: scarce any one would do an act of injustice, could he gain his end without it, and this is, in some degree, confirmed by the horror of conscience, that some visibly discover, on the commission of any notorious crime. And the uneasiness, that attends a course of impiety is still greater in such, as have been blest'd with a religious education. Such cannot live without painful alarms from their own conscience. So, in the midst of all their sinful pleasures, they find at least at intervals, that it is a yoke that galls them.

Hence, by the way, such Christians; who from their infancy, have grown up in the fear and knowledge of the Lord; have walk'd suitably to the light of the Gospel revelation: and so improv'd the helps they have been favour'd with, as to have escap'd the pollutions of the age, and have been ever prevailing subject to the law of God: as these, comparatively speaking, need not repentance; as their own conscience must bring in a different testimony than that of the children of disobedience; so they have no reason to disquiet themselves, that they have not felt such pricking to the heart as more notorious sinners; or that they cannot fix on any time when they ceas'd to do evil, and learn'd to do well, so as persons recover'd from a course of impiety may.

may. Yet this should be no discouragement to them, nor made so by others, (for he that doth righteousness, is righteous,) but it should rather be an encouragement to early piety; in as much as thereby, they will be free from the painful reflexions of guilt contracted; that others have reason with bitterness, to lament, and to repent of by particular acts of contrition.

2. I observe that the difficulty of breaking off a course and habit of sin, how great soever, is most at first, and gradually lessens. It can no more be continued in, than broke off, without uneasiness: but, the longer such a course is continued in; the greater the difficulty of a recovery, and the more dismal the prospects the soul is filled with: nay, suppose it stupid, it must then be depriv'd of all the pleasure the religious mind has from a faith in God. For, God is either not in all his thoughts, or he is regarded as an object of terrour. The latter is unavoidable, if he thinks at all of God, and has any remaining sense of the divine perfections. While any one is by wicked works an enemy to God: while his mind is at enmity with the law of God; he must think of God as an object of terrour. The more just his notions are of the purity, majesty, and power of the Almighty, the more terrible must it be to his thoughts, to consider himself as in a state of enmity to the Almighty God. But, suppose God is not in all his thoughts, what does he deprive himself of? what gloomy prospects must that man have, who has no higher hope than in this life? A life of uncertainty and disappointment, in which he is liable to numerous calamities; that neither his power, nor interest, nor wisdom, can guard against, or support him under: and yet the great Preserver of all things is banish'd from his thoughts. But, now, the Christian, who submits himself

himself to the yoke of Christ, will find a growing pleasure in a religious course, that will daily lighten the difficulty, the further he proceeds, the more will he see that the commandments of God, by Christ are not grievous, but reasonable; as the observance of them is perfective of his nature, and enables him to view the Almighty as his friend, in whose power and perfection he may safely confide in the greatest dangers: he will find the fruit of righteousness to be peace of conscience, and with God. So that thus far the advantage is greatly on the christian side.

3. This will yet further appear, if we take into the account the motives set before him, and the assistance he is warranted to expect. I would not talk deceitfully for God: he, that will live godly in this present world, must expect to meet with persecution in some degree; and to be called to self-denial and mortification; and that, sometimes, of desires innocent in themselves, when the gratification of them is not inconsistent with superior obligations. This the Christian may be called to: but, when he has learn'd to consider himself as a pilgrim; he will be less concern'd at the treatment he meets with in his journey: and, while his faith stretches within the veil, where his Saviour is already enter'd, and reaches to the unseen world; these present afflictions will become light and momentary: --- and, hence, he obtains victory: for, this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. And what may not he endure, whose regards are fixed upon the invisible God? who believes the future judgment, and the recompence of reward, and the power of our Lord *Jesus* to save all that come unto God by him? Nay, we read of being more than conquerors thro' him that loved us: this has sometimes eminently appear'd in the case of martyr-

dom. Some, who who have been called to it, have not only conquered, but triumphed over every thing dreadful to human nature: and it is an encouraging motive, that God, who is faithful, will not forget our labour of love; and that, if we are called to eminent trials, we have set before us eminent rewards. Whence our Saviour bids his disciples, when persecuted for his sake, to rejoice and be exceeding glad: for, great, says he, is your reward in heaven: and, this we know, that if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him: and, if we will not distrust his veracity we may assure our selves that no man will be a loser in the end, by any thing that he may suffer for the sake of *Jesus Christ*.

It is really from an evil heart of unbelief, if we do not find the practice of religion easy under the influence of such motives; it is, because we do not attend to the works of the Lord, nor attend to the declarations he hath made. But, however, if the sinner is really awaken'd to the sense of his guilt; if he is under a concern to escape the wrath of God, and is disposed to break off his sins by repentance, but is discouraged by the force of corrupt habits, and, while he owns the suitableness of the motives propos'd to his faith, yet feels a difficulty to maintain an habitual sense of these things on his mind: why, still, he is encouraged with the promise of the Holy Spirit; on the easy terms of asking in earnest, *Luke xi. 13*. If he turns, at God's reproof, he may expect that God will pour out his Holy Spirit upon him; under whose influence, while he is doing what he can; in meditating on subjects most suitable to influence his mind; in avoiding all occasions of making provision for the flesh; and in watchfulness against those sins that do most easily beset him: whilst he is thus acting in hope, and with
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dependance on the help of God's Holy Spirit ; then, agreeably to the gospel maxim, *To him that bath shall be given* ; he may expect to gain a more fix'd habitual sense of the objects of faith ; and, so, new and better habits be introduc'd ; while these considerations grow habitual, and have the governing influence over his life. Such is the virtue of faith that it will remove mountains. Those objections, that appear'd unsurmountable, will be render'd contemptible. The proud, the covetuous, and the selfish person ; did they fix their thoughts on him, who, tho' the Heir of all things, yet became poor ; and on the eternal inheritance, that he has set before them : they would be ashamed of such a spirit, and become more humble, more generous, and dilated in their affections. Were such things believ'd, and seriously regarded ; we should blush at the trifling excuses we make for our sinful follies, and be ashamed of all excuses, that we dare not plead before the divine tribunal. And, were men prevail'd on thus to act ; who sees not the advantage ? So that if we duly consider the motives and helps afforded to a religious life, as peculiarly discover'd in the Gospel ; we may justly deem *Christ's* yoke easy compared with the power of sinful habits.

This methinks must be allowed by all, who, consider, on the one hand, the consequences of a sinful course in the present state : remorse of conscience, diseases, disgrace, and the loss of all that pleasure, that arises from a rational trust in the Almighty ; and, as to futurity, the dismal hopes of annihilation, or the more dreadful prospects of eternal vengeance. And, then, on the other hand, turn their thoughts to the brighter prospects of the faithful Christian ; who has peace of conscience, friendship with God, contentment in a firm dependance on present supplies, and joy in the hopes of eternal salvation.

Upon

Upon the whole, what can more engage us to submit to the government of the meek, and lowly *Jesus*, than the conviction of its great ease, compared with the law of *Moses*? Its great advantage to us (deprav'd, ignorant, sinful creatures) compar'd with the light of nature: and its being much lighter than the inventions of men, or the power of vicious habits; in opposition to which it may justly be esteemed a law of liberty; what can more allure us? when we add to all this, that such, as do submit to his dominion shall find everlasting rest to their souls: which brings me to,

The Conclusion, Let us then submit to his government, who has the words of eternal life; and is the Author of eternal salvation to all that obey him: and, sure, if any thing, this will bring rest to our souls. And, what now remains, but that all, to whom this grace of God, which bringeth salvation, hath appear'd, improve its teachings, and aids, so as to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts; and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; and to take heed that they neglect not this great salvation: and that they express this disposition by an unreserv'd subjection to our Lord's authority; by departing from iniquity; by evidencing their moderation, or the due government of their tempers to all men; by having their righteousness exceed that of the scribes, and pharisees; and by doing more than others, that are not so peculiarly privileged: that others may be induc'd to own our religion to be more than a form, or human device; and, by our good works, be led to glorify our heavenly Father. Whoever shall thus order his conversation aright, cannot fail of seeing the salvation of God, and finding rest to his soul.

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